

## **Message from the Chief**

### **Chief's Memo – March 6, 2006**

#### ***Hemet-Ryan Decision***

I spent last week in Riverside County and met with the Board of Supervisors to deliver my decision on Hemet-Ryan. I would like you all to understand my rationale in deciding to keep the CDF Airbase in Riverside County at Hemet-Ryan. I was persuaded by briefings I received from Sacramento and Region staff, the Riverside Unit Chief, the CDF and contract pilots (who have years of experience flying out of Hemet-Ryan in S2T's), and the union leadership (chapter and statewide).



Additionally, I weighed the political impacts from those who favored staying at Hemet including: state legislators (who were all in favor of staying), the Agency Secretary, and the locally elected Board of Supervisors (who were 4-1 in favor of staying, with the one agreeing to support whatever I decided).

Pilot safety, operational effectiveness, and customer satisfaction were all key components of my decision making process.

Below is my report to the Riverside Board of Supervisors:

I have concluded that Hemet-Ryan Airbase provides the best location for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) initial air tanker response for Riverside County and surrounding areas. This is based on the review of all existing Hemet-Ryan Air Attack relocation reports, interviews of local CDF fire command officers, CDF contract pilots, CDF headquarters staff, local officials, state legislators, public stakeholders, and personal visits and flights over the affected area.

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF), at the request of the Riverside Board of Supervisors, have reviewed the Hemet-Ryan Air Attack relocation plan. Several recent CDF studies provided insights into operational, pilot safety, and air attack base contractual requirements. In reviewing the reports, I find both strengths and weaknesses in their findings and recommendations. The key areas of importance address fire suppression, operational issues, and pilot safety from an air base facility perspective.

It is clear that March Air Reserve Base currently provides the longer operational runway to support air operations. Additionally, Hemet-Ryan does not provide the

security or controlled air space capability that March provides. Fortunately, these issues can be solved by improvements suggested and supported by the Riverside County Hemet-Ryan Airport Master Plan and decision to extend the Hemet Airport runway proposed by the Riverside County Board of Supervisors. The longstanding Riverside County/CDF partnership provides an excellent basis for a collaborative effort in successfully achieving the State mission of resource protection and the County mission of life and property protection.

The factors that I have been most persuaded by include the following:

- 1) Hemet has optimal weather conditions because the San Jacinto Valley has a unique microclimate. During fire season, any marine overcast or fog that occurs will clear (burn off) earlier than areas to the West, Northwest, and North. The strong prevailing Southwest wind in this valley creates a “shear line” that prevents smog and associated low visibility from building up in the valley.
- 2) The runway at Hemet-Ryan is aligned southwest northeast, creating more favorable conditions for takeoffs and landings during periods of Santa Ana wind events. Pilots and base personnel who lived in the San Jacinto Valley for 30+ years have observed these conditions.
- 3) Hemet-Ryan is the most ideal location for a rapid initial attack to the East, Southeast, South, and Southwest. It is also closer to back country areas in northern San Diego County that carry a high potential for fires to escape initial attack and become large fires.
- 4) During initial attack and longer fire events, turn around times by S-2T aircraft will be longer at March due to more air traffic, longer runways, more taxi time, and wake turbulence delays. This can greatly affect the time to control a fire and thus increase the fire size and fire loss.
- 5) There are more fire engines, more roads, better ground access, and less wildland urban interface in proximity to March. Urban growth is to the West of Hemet-Ryan toward March. Air support is needed more in the rural areas where access is less, such as the areas to the East of Hemet-Ryan. Strategically, the Hemet-Ryan location reduces response time to these areas of concern.
- 6) March and the surrounding area is subject to a deeper marine layer and smog coming from Orange County and the Los Angeles Basin. It is north of the “shear line” previously explained.
- 7) The North-South orientation of the runway at March will, at times, create a crosswind component that exceeds the takeoff limit for S-2T aircraft during Santa Ana wind events.
- 8) March, because of commercial and military use, has greater noise and jet

exhaust pollution which may have a greater environmental and fatigue impact on pilots during operations where pilots often fly up to seven hours a day, and as many as 15 missions per day.

9) The CDF's longstanding relationship with Riverside County is important and needs to foster a partnership in which decisions affecting local government are made jointly.

10) The CDF's relationship with the State legislature is important and needs to foster a relationship in which local legislators have input into decisions made by CDF and local government that affect the state mission.

11) The CDF longstanding relationship with CDF Firefighters is important and needs to foster a process in which CDF Firefighters input is considered for decisions affecting their membership.

I am directing CDF/Riverside County Fire Chief Craig Anthony to meet as soon as possible with Riverside County officials. Along with support from CDF headquarters staff, he is to finalize the project plan and necessary agreements to ensure the Hemet-Ryan Air Attack Base continues to provide the air resources to achieve both the State and County fire protection missions.

I appreciate the extensive participation and input that I received during the evaluation of this important decision.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Grijalva', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ruben Grijalva, Chief  
Acting Director

Attached are a few articles regarding the Hemet-Ryan decision follow this week's memo.

## **Legislators Praise Fire Decision**

### **CDF Support of Hemet-Ryan is Great News for Riverside County**

Sacramento – Riverside County legislators today applauded the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's (CDF) announcement that the state's fire fighting air attack base would stay at the Hemet-Ryan location. Today's announcement by Chief Ruben Grijalva to the Riverside County Board of Supervisors is a welcome culmination to a debate over the location of this critical fire facility.

"Moving the Hemet-Ryan Air Attack Base to the March Airport would have had major consequences for Riverside County," Senator Battin said. "I am grateful Chief Grijalva was willing to consider the strong arguments made by our legislative delegation and fire personnel."

The Hemet-Ryan Air Base is strategically located for a rapid response to fires that threaten both Riverside County and North San Diego County. Moving the base to March could have increased CDF's response time, potentially allowing a small fire to escalate into a larger one and posing greater danger to the public's safety.

"Riverside County and San Diego County are at critical risk for a massive fire in the region," commented Senator Hollingsworth. "Like the fires of 2003 that ravaged Riverside and San Diego, we've seen what happens when the tinderbox is lit with the loss of lives and property."

Senators Battin, Hollingsworth and Ducheny and Assemblymembers Bogh, Garcia and Benoit have personally lobbied state officials on the importance of keeping the Air Attack Base at Hemet-Ryan. The state initially indicated it was set on moving the base to March and even appropriated \$8 million in last year's budget for the transition costs. However, at the personal request of state legislators, as well as local officials, CDF Chief Grijalva re-evaluated the pros and cons associated with the move.

With commitments made by county officials to make improvements at Hemet-Ryan and by legislators to work on re-appropriating the funding in this year's budget, the Chief agreed that Hemet-Ryan is the best location for the state's regional firefighting efforts.

"Today's decision reinforces the longstanding, positive relationship Riverside County has had with the CDF," Bogh said. "I applaud their willingness to look at arguments in support of Hemet-Ryan with objectivity and fairness."

"CDF is committed to working with Riverside County to improve the safety of both emergency personnel and local residents," Assemblywoman Garcia noted. "We look forward to continued cooperation on this issue."

**CDF craft not going to March ARB  
SUPERVISORS: Firefighting airplanes will remain at Hemet-Ryan  
Airport, board members are told.**

07:45 AM PST on Wednesday, March 1, 2006

By SEAN NEALON / The Press-Enterprise

The California Department of Forestry reversed course and now wants to leave firefighting aircraft at Hemet-Ryan Airport instead of moving it to March Air Reserve Base.

Leaving the aircraft at Hemet-Ryan is safer for pilots because of better weather conditions and safer for residents in fire-prone communities such as Idyllwild and Anza because response times will be quicker, Acting CDF Director Ruben Grijalva told Riverside County supervisors Tuesday.

Local and state officials will now begin creating a timeline for improvements at Hemet-Ryan and determine how they will be funded. The runway will be lengthened and aging buildings, some of which have been there about 50 years, will be replaced, state and county fire officials said.

Aircraft will continue to use Hemet-Ryan this fire season, Grijalva said. The decision to stay at Hemet-Ryan comes almost a year after Riverside County Supervisor Jeff Stone, whose district includes Hemet-Ryan, pushed a resolution opposing the transfer about 20 miles northwest to March, which borders Moreno Valley. The supervisors approved that resolution in April.

CDF's decision was applauded Tuesday by Stone, other supervisors, Riverside County Fire Chief Craig Anthony, Inland state legislators and Blair Ceniceros, president of the Idyllwild-based Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council.

Ceniceros said residents in communities nestled in the San Bernardino National Forest fear wildfires spreading up the hillsides toward their homes

"Having that kind of support, that close, is just essential," he said by phone.

The reaction was mixed from Richard Stewart, chairman of the March Joint Powers Commission, which oversees civilian reuse of surplus military land at the joint-use air base.

Stewart, also a Moreno Valley councilman, said he was somewhat disappointed CDF will not be coming to March but that he was happy the aircraft will remain in Riverside County and that improvements will be made at Hemet-Ryan. He said March officials would now begin marketing the space they had set aside for CDF to other potential users.

After the supervisors voted to oppose the move to March, two studies were completed about the potential move. The study by Riverside County officials

found aircraft were better positioned to fight wildfires at Hemet-Ryan, while a state report concluded they would be equally or better positioned at March.

Both reports factored into the decision made by Grijalva, who took over as acting CDF director in January.

He concluded that Hemet-Ryan, compared with March, offered better visibility for pilots and a more favorable runway alignment for take-offs and landings during Santa Ana winds.

He also said Hemet-Ryan was the ideal location for rapid responses to fires in less-populated, mountainous areas east, south, southeast and southwest of the airport that are most difficult for fire engines to reach. At March, he concluded, the longer runway would have helped air operations and the security and airspace control would also have been beneficial.

However, improvements planned for Hemet-Ryan will address these issues. Some already have been made, including adding a fence around the airport and repairing parts of the runway, Grijalva said.

In last year's state budget, \$8 million was allocated to CDF to transition operations to March. State legislators are now working to re-appropriate that money to this year's budget, according to a news release from state Sen. Jim Battin, whose district includes Hemet.

## **Riverside County Firefighting Base Will Stay Put A long state-local standoff ends over the operation at Hemet-Ryan Airport.**

By Susannah Rosenblatt, Times Staff Writer  
March 1, 2006

Ending years of political wrangling and delays, state fire officials announced Tuesday that air tankers dispatched to Riverside County's most wildfire-prone areas would continue to be based at Hemet-Ryan Airport rather than move northwest to March Air Reserve Base near Moreno Valley.

The decision eases increasingly strained relations between Riverside County supervisors, who wanted the operation to stay put, and state fire officials, who had favored the move to March.

The state officials told the supervisors Tuesday that key factors in keeping the four-aircraft firefighting fleet at Hemet-Ryan were the clearer weather conditions and lighter air traffic there, as well as the proximity to fire-prone communities in the southern part of the county.

Within the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, "there were two opposing views, and a decision had to be made," said Ruben Grijalva, acting director of the state fire agency and state fire marshal.

The safety of area residents, pilots and firefighters was of primary concern in the choice to keep the nearly 50-year-old Hemet-Ryan base — one of the busiest fire attack air bases in the nation, Grijalva said.

Riverside County is the state agency's largest client, paying about \$100 million annually for firefighting services, said CDF spokesman Michael Jarvis.

The five-member Board of Supervisors applauded the decision.

Keeping the tankers at Hemet-Ryan will mean a "sigh of relief in the easternmost part of this county," said Supervisor Jeff Stone, whose district includes the airport.

Stone had been a vocal advocate for Hemet-Ryan since constituents raised concerns about the proposed move early last year. He argued that moving to March, 15 miles away, would create a 10- to 15-minute delay for air crews trying to reach blazes in remote, forested communities such as Idyllwild and Anza.

Although the aging base at Hemet-Ryan needs major work, it's "better located to the problem areas that we have for fire responses," said the base's battalion chief, John Winder.

Projections for overhauling the facilities at Hemet-Ryan — including new administrative buildings, hangars and retardant mixing space — have been as high as \$14 million but will probably be less, Jarvis said. The work could take several years.

A move to March was first proposed in 1997, but negotiations and budget constraints stalled it. About \$500,000 has been spent on the proposed transfer, with an estimated \$8 million budgeted for the project, Jarvis said.

Tuesday's comments heralded a thaw in the frosty relations between the county and state officials last year. The Board of Supervisors had become so frustrated with state fire officials that it investigated the possibility of creating a separate fire force.

Now state officials are working, Grijalva said, to "try to be responsive to local concerns."

## **FIRE PREVENTION**

Robert Chew has joined Sacramento's fire prevention staff as a Battalion Chief in charge of fire planning. Robert previously worked in LNU as a fire captain specialist in prevention. Before that, he was LNU's fire planner, so he comes to the team with a strong prevention background.

## **AVIATION MANAGEMENT**

The winter maintenance of the aircraft is running smoothly and ahead of schedule. With half of the winter remaining, 65% of work has been completed. The maintenance department has dedicated itself to proactively eliminating any areas of corrosion to preserve long term performance and reliability. In addition, the engineering department has been active in conducting detailed inspections of outside vendors producing replacement aircraft parts.

The Safety Department has initiated a Facility Safety Committee, responsible for addressing maintenance, ground safety, and hazardous material concerns. The first meeting, held last week, reviewed all concerns at the McClellan airbase, while future meetings will include statewide airbases.

## **RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

An application to convert 2,000 acres of timberland in Sonoma County to vineyards is to be submitted this month. Sonoma County will be the lead agency under CEQA as this is an immediate rezoning of land currently under the Timberland Production Zone.

The final Environmental Coordinator Training session will be given in Riverside March 7, 2006. This will conclude the statewide training effort of Unit and Regional Environmental Coordinators.

An initial discussion package for development of a Road Management Plan as a certified functional equivalent to CEQA has been completed and will be presented to the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection's Forest Practice Committee in March.

A public hearing will be held March 9, 2006 at the California Energy Commission Hearing Room A on a report to the Governor by the BioEnergy Integrated Work Group. The report contains recommendations to the Governor for actions that will increase the use of bioenergy in California. This includes residues from fuel hazard reduction projects.

1.) Sudden Oak Death update: Under the old way of handling SOD, a THP/NTMP served as the compliance agreement if it contained certain information, and CDF was the enforcing agency of the quarantine within the



Board of Forestry, Zone of Infestation (ZOI). The agricultural commissioners have decided that they do not want to deal with quarantine issues for SOD on forest land any longer, so compliance agreement language regarding the ZOI is not needed or wanted in plans. The agricultural commissioners will limit their regulation to nursery stock. For SOD hosts grown on forest land, compliance agreements involving agricultural commissioners will be limited to shipment of host materials from within the ZOI to without the ZOI. The ZOI designation requires RPFs to identify feasible measures to mitigate adverse infestation or infection impacts from timber operations. This would include informing their crew that they are working in an infested area, checking vehicles leaving the harvest area to keep the host material from being moved offsite, and the location of where water is drafted and used, etc. These are all the current mitigations that have been commonly posted and used for several years. These measures were commonly accepted by most RPFs because they satisfied the requirements of a compliance agreement. Since a compliance agreement will no longer be needed, RPFs may develop other forms of mitigation that will most likely require project specific evaluation by CDF review team staff. In the past, having a generally accepted suite of mitigation made things much simpler for plan reviewers.

2.) Fresno review team staff is working in concert with staff from San Benito Monterey Unit regarding the golf course expansion proposal by Pebble Beach Company. The project involves commercial timber operations and conversion of timberland. Coastal Zone regulations and county specific forest practice regulations for the Southern District complicate implementation of the project. Unit staff will participate in an upcoming Coastal Commission field trip to the project site on March 8<sup>th</sup>.

3.) Public comment on the JDSF EIR closed on March 1, 2006. The Department has begun the process of reviewing the comments received.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

The sixth episode of "It Could Happen Tomorrow", about the possibility of the largest wildfire California has ever seen, will premiere on The Weather Channel on Sunday, March 12, at 9:30 p.m. The series has been an amazing success for the network so far. Several CDF and OES officials were interviewed for the program.

Some great photos from last year's Border 50 fire were taken by a NIFC contracted photographer Kari Greer and can be viewed online. Here is a sample of her work:

[http://photos.kariphotos.com/Border\\_50/](http://photos.kariphotos.com/Border_50/)

## **OFFICE OF STATE FIRE MARSHAL**

Pipeline Engineers Chuck MacDonald and Linda Zigler are attending an Office of Pipeline Safety workshop in Houston. The workshop is aimed at sharing information on Mechanical Damage among operators and technical experts and to broaden regulator and operator perspectives with information vital to pipeline inspection and oversight.

Senator Torlakson has introduced Senate Bill 1359 to strengthen the state's call before dig law. This was a result of the Walnut Creek pipeline accident and will directly affect owners of petroleum, high-pressure natural gas and pressurized sewage lines.

NASFM has selected Monterey to be the site of their one day *California State Pipeline Safety Meeting*. The date will be April 18 with a reception the evening of April 17. The hotel will be the Monterey Plaza Hotel. Elizabeth Tucker will be contacting our office for approval of an invite letter and suggestions for a keynote speaker.

Supervising Pipeline Engineering Applications were due on Feb 24. Once we have received clearances from HR we will be conducting interviews.

Fire and Life Safety staff met with Patrick Kemp, Asst. Secretary of Resources and representatives of DWR and General Services. The purpose of the meeting was to inform SFM that the West End Project has been effectively cancelled. As a result, Asst Secretary Kemp asked the SFM about the current fire safety of the Resources Building. To determine the current fire safety status of the building and what, if any, upgrades could be made to the building; SFM staff will be conducting a complete inspection of the building in the very near future.